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ABSTRACT

Procedures for teaching about women and the Vietnam War using class activities and discussion questions are presented. The topics for which activities are suggested include: analysis of quotes by nurses and military women; dealing with the war-caused deaths; journalists; and civilian women. A list of seven references is included. (DB)

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TEACHING ABOUT WOMEN AND THE VIETNAM WAR

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Teaching Procedures

Introductory Lesson Ideas

Type of class organization: Whole class activity or small group followed by sharing of ideas with entire class.

1. When you think of the Vietnam war what are the things that you know happened to the people who went to Vietnam during the war? List what the students suggest. Place the letter "F" beside those that you believe happened to females and a "M" beside those that you believe happened to males. Compare the classifications. Ask for justifications for their reasoning and if they know for certain the source of their data.

2. Record the types of data on another list. Ask the students to rate each source for accuracy. Use a 10 point scale where 1 is highly questionable and 10 is very accurate. Other ratings may be added such as "S" for stereotypical, "?" for possible but not probable. 3. Combine student ideas and record them as hypotheses. After the completion of the study, examine the hypotheses and affirm or rewrite them for greater accuracy. Return to the original list and assess how accurate the original ideas were concerning what happened to women during the Vietnam War.

An alternative hypothesizing activity begins with the task of listing all of the roles that the students think women played in the Vietnam War. Classification begins with predicting those which were true for Vietnamese "V" women vs those for women of other "O" nationalities. The activity continues following step 2 as described above.

Analyzing Quotations

Quotations by Vietnam Nurses reflecting on the war.

Maggi Arriola commenting on her experience at the August 1984 dedication of a 33-inch bronze statue of an American nurse at the Landmark Center in St. Paul, MN. "You could feel the closeness in the air. The veterans in the audience stood up first, and then everybody stood up and applauded. It's not that I had been waiting for someone to say thank you, but nobody ever had."--Women in War p. 226

"Someday this will end and I'll go home and wear cute white uniforms and work an eight-hour day and sleep without nightmares and I'll be happy and satisfied with my county hospital pediatric ward job and I'll forget I ever lived in this horror and who are you trying to kid anyway, Jones?" Nancy I. Jones (Jones,1971)

"You know, I think about it every day...I think about Vietnam every day." Diane Evans (Sater, 1990 p. 157)

"We'd get these little Vietnamese kids,... babies torn apart by bombs. When I look back, it's those children who stick in my mind. They hadn't done anything to anybody." Mary Dickinson (Strick, 1988)

"Some of the women and children who seemed so innocent were really VC by night. When a chopper landed and GIs came in half-blown away- Maybe the next chopper were women and teenagers, and you didn't know if they were the VC, if they had done that to the guys.... You dealt with that in a sense of suppressing your feelings or your questions so that you could go on and function." Charlotte Capozoli Miller- A Piece of My Heart (Walker, 1985,p. 328)

Quotations made during the war by Military Women Military who were not nurses.

"If American women were half as fragil as the brass seem to think they are, we never would have conquered the West." A sergeant WAF 1966 (Holm, 1982 p.207)

"Women fought as hard as the men to build this country and shot as many Indians... you'd think we were a bunch of sissies." A major WAC 1966 (Holm, 1982 p. 209)

"WAF airmen continually ask me why they are not allowed to 'pull their share of the burden' in Southeast Asia when men who

have families must go involuntarily, and some may now be threatened with second tours. These women know that nurses, civil service employees, WAC's and Red Cross women are serving in Southeast Asia and they can find no logical reason why enlisted women in the Air Force should be considered unacceptable by their own Service. While lack of housing may have been a good excuse initially, it becomes less and less acceptable as time goes on." Jeanne Holm, WAF Director 1967 (Holm, 1982 p.222)

Questions to ask in analyzing the quotations:

1. What emotions or feelings are expressed by the women? How do these quotes make you feel?
2. What might account for the differences in the emotions of the nurses and those of the non-nurses?
3. How do you think these women coped with the issues? What evidence is there in their quotes to support your answer? What additional ways might the women have used to cope while they were in Vietnam? How do you think they have coped since returning?
4. What methods do you think are the most productive in dealing with stress? Why?
5. List 6 things that might have happened in Vietnam that you believe would cause the greatest amounts of stress. Indicate which of these impacted the women and which the men. What justification do you think was given for not providing women with the help that the men received? Do you consider this a valid justification? Why or why not?
6. Today, women in the military are still not officially in combat. Why would women want to be allowed into combat units?

Why is their a feeling that women do not belong in combat? Do these reasons have as much validity in an all volunteer military?

Dealing with the Deaths

Psychologists tell us that it usually takes two years to work through the stages of mourning and to come to acceptance of the death of a loved one. In America it is the child that buries the parent not the reverse. As you discuss the following with your students be sensative to the fact that death is something that many of the students have had little experience in dealing with and many be uncomfortable.

1. List the emotions that women might feel when they learned of the death of their child or husband.
2. What types of information or comments might help them through this difficult time.
3. What policies or procedures used by the military might have been helpful and which not helpful?
4. In what ways might the controversy over the presence of the U.S. in Vietnam have hindered or helped those suffering from the death of a child, spouse, sibling or fathers.
5. At what points in their later lives do you think that those whose loved-ones were killed in Vietnam might be inclined to recall the fact, be resentful or mourn again?
6. Compare the societies and place of women in America and Vietnam. In what ways are the needs of an American and a Vietnamese women for a husband or son similar? different?

7. Among the Vietnamese there were many more deaths of husbands, fathers and sons. How do you think that fact impacted the lives of women in Vietnam after the war?

8. Ask the students to reflect on the truth of the following quote and to describe the person they think made it. " I think any bullet, from whoever it comes, is shot at the mother first, not the son who is killed." Van Le veteran fighter reflecting on his experience of returning to his village in the North where he saw the mothers and learned that half of his friends had died in the war. The passage ends with "I think about the war every day. I have three sons now. I would never, never send them off to war." (Sater, 1990 p. 157)

9. Have your students react to the following dialog and to describe the person being interviewed.

"You killed a lot of people... do you have any regrets now, ten, fifteen years later?"

"No. If I had not shot them, they would have killed me."

"Any thoughts about their mothers or their wives; any bad dreams?"

"No. I sometimes dream about the fighting, but I would not call them bad dreams. If I were to think about mothers and wives, I would think about the Vietnamese mothers and wives. The Americans should have stayed home."

"Have you ever met an American, talked to one?"

"Yes. I captured one. They gave me a medal for it."

(Sater, 1990 p. 168)

Above dialog between Morley Safer and Tran Thi Gung a forty-two year old woman who fought from the age of sixteen from the tunnels in Cu Chi District. Her father was killed by the South Vietnamese army in 1964 and his friends came and told her she should join the fight.

Journalists

Discussion questions:

1. Today there are many women TV reporters covering the situation in the Persian Gulf. Why weren't their female TV reporters covering the war in Vietnam?
2. What do you think motivated journalists to go go Vietnam? Do you think that the women had the same motives as the men?
3. Most of the articles that appeared in women's magazines such as Vogue, Ladies Home Journal, Mademoiselle, and Good Housekeeping about Vietnam were written by women. What do you think these article said about Vietnam?
4. When Dickey Chapelle was killed in Vietnam, she received a Marine escort of six men to her final resting place in Wisconsin. When Marguerite Higgins died of a disease contacted in Vietnam, she was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. What do such honors tell you about these women journalists?
5. Do you think female journalists from nations other than the U.S. had any advantages over American women journalists? All of the female journalists captured during the war were released after a short period of time. So also were some of the captured male

journalists. Some of the men were not released inspite of attempts by many groups of journalists to gain their release or information about them. What explanations can you offer for this set of facts?

6. Kate Webb told the Vietnamese who captured her and asked what she was doing in that area that she was trying to find out the truth about what was happening. How do journalists go about finding out the truth in a time of war? What difficulties do you think they might have in getting their stories printed or aired? Would you consider a journalists job rewarding? Would it be worth the risks to you? Why? Some journalists are better than others, how do you know which ones to believe and which journalists' reports to question? Can you believe the reporters who are nationals of other nations or citizens of the enemy nations? Why or why not?

Civilian Women

1. What would motivate civilians to go to other nations to work? Would there be different motives if the nation were politically unstable?

2. How are civilians protected when they go to other nations? Why didn't the American government pressure civilians not to go to Vietnam or take an action to keep them from going?

3. When we remove the number of women killed on the C5A crash during operation Baby Lift, there still were many more civilian women killed in Vietnam than there were military women. Why might that be the case?

4. Why is it necessary for women to have recognition for their experiences during the Vietnam War?

A poem left at the Vietnam Memorial Wall

Hello, David-- my name is Dusty.
I'm your night nurse.
I will stay with you.
I will check your vitals
every 15 minutes.
I will document
inevitability.
I will hang more blood
and give you something
for your pain.
I will stay with you
and I will touch your face.

Yes, Of course,
I will write you mother
and tell her you were brave,
I will write your mother
and tell her how much you loved her.
I will write your mother
and tell her to give your bratty kid sister
a big kiss and hug.
What I will not tell her
is that your were wasted.

I will stay with you
and I will hold your hand.
I will stay with you
and watch your life
flow through my fingers
into my soul.
I will stay with you
until you stay with me.

Goodbye, David-- my name is Dusty.
I'm the last person
you will see.
I'm the last person
you will touch.
I'm the last person
who will love you.

So long, David-- my name is Dusty.
David -- who will give me something
for my pain?

Dusty Vietnam 1966-1968 (Palmer,1987 p.127-128)

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